

Chapter 4 A Job for Life

The work of the royal family has continued through all the changes of the last fifty or sixty years. If you are born into the royal family, you have to work very hard. There are many traditions which you have to protect. There are hundreds of formal ceremonies. Even when you are tired, you have to try to look happy. You must show interest in the people that you meet. Queen Elizabeth has given her life to the country. Most people agree that she does her job very well.

When she is in London for her working day, she looks first at the British newspapers. Then she turns to her letters. Two or three hundred arrive at Buckingham Palace each day for her. She chooses some to read, and every letter is answered by palace officials. After this, her private secretaries show her official papers. She must look at them, study them, or sign them. Many come

from the British government, or from Commonwealth countries. They arrive at the Queen's desk in special red boxes.

Later in the morning, Queen Elizabeth usually sees important visitors at the Palace. These can be people from the Church of England, or Parliament, or officials who work for Britain abroad. She sees each person alone for about ten or twenty minutes. Sometimes there is a formal meeting with government ministers before lunch.

The Queen usually has lunch privately, but every two months she and Prince Philip invite guests to lunch with them in Buckingham Palace. She likes to meet people with different kinds of jobs, and to hear about their lives.

After lunch, she often goes out on a public visit, perhaps to a hospital, school or factory. Sometimes these visits take longer, and the Queen flies to another city or travels at night on the royal train. This is a very comfortable train with bedrooms, a sitting-room, a dining-room and a very modern office.

Once a week, the Queen meets the Prime Minister privately. They discuss government business and important things that are happening in the country. In the early days, Elizabeth changed the official time of these meetings with the Prime Minister so she could be with her small children at bath-time! When she was made queen, the Prime Minister was Winston Churchill. He was famous for his war work. At first, he didn't really listen to her – she was young, and only a woman! But he soon realized that she was very interested in the government of the country. After that, he spent longer and longer talking to her.

In the evening the Queen reads the report of the day from Parliament. She isn't a politician, and in modern Britain the power is with the government, but she must agree to every new law. This is a formal agreement; no British king or queen has refused a new law since 1707! During her meetings with the Prime Minister, she can tell him her views. If she does not agree

with the government's plans, she can say that. Officially, the Queen chooses the new Prime Minister too.

Later in the evening, Elizabeth sometimes goes out to parties or to the theatre. Usually these are official visits, so she is still on duty. Then, before bed, the Queen sometimes looks again at her 'red boxes' of papers. It is a long working day!



There is a royal working year too. There are many historic British traditions, and the Queen often goes to special ceremonies. One of the most famous is the State Opening of Parliament; this happens every year, usually in October or November. The Queen, wearing her crown, arrives at the Houses of Parliament by carriage. Special royal guards search Parliament. They are making sure that it is safe for the Queen. This tradition began in the year 1605, after a man called Guy Fawkes tried to destroy Parliament with a kind of home-made bomb. In modern times, with new bombers in the world, it is again a serious search, and the police help too. In Parliament, Elizabeth reads the Queen's Speech. This discusses the government's work for the next year.

The Queen has two birthdays – her real one, on 21 April, and an official one in June, when the weather is often sunny! On this day, the Queen goes to a ceremony called 'the trooping of the colour'. Soldiers, called the Guards, in red jackets and tall black hats ride on horseback down a street in Whitehall, London. The sound of guns welcomes the Queen and the royal family. The Queen checks her soldiers, and some of them play music for her.

Another unusual royal ceremony, a Christian tradition, happens in a different church each year on the Thursday before Easter Sunday. The Queen gives out purses of special money, usually to older people who have done good work. This is called 'Maundy money', and the ceremony is about seven hundred years old.



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A favourite tradition is the tradition of the royal garden parties. There are three or more of these at Buckingham Palace each summer, and one at the Palace of Holyroodhouse, in Edinburgh, Scotland. The Queen invites all kinds of people. Some are famous, but other people have just worked hard for charities for a long time. About 8,000 guests come to each party. Prince Philip and other 'royals' often come too, so the royal family can talk to as many people as possible. At each garden party, the guests drink about 27,000 cups of tea; they eat 20,000 sandwiches and 20,000 pieces of cake!

The Queen is rich, but the royal family are usually very careful with money. They have to 'put on a good show' for the public, so they have to buy a lot of new, expensive clothes. They have to give large formal dinners and parties. But their tastes are much



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simpler. When the Queen and Prince Philip are alone, they have just one dish for lunch. They only buy new things when they have to. Even the royal Rolls Royce cars aren't usually new; one is over forty years old!

The Queen and the royal family often travel abroad as guests of other countries. The Queen has visited a very large number of countries, including every country in the British Commonwealth. Now, changes in the world have opened Central and Eastern Europe too. In May 1998, Prince Edward travelled to Estonia, Russia, Latvia and Lithuania. A trip like that wasn't possible only a few years before.